**Climate activism**

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One lesson the disastrous Nato-Russia war in Ukraine has taught us is that an attempt to decrease the climate catastrophe by kicking the oil, gas and coal habit must be carefully planned. A perfect recipe for turning popular opinion anti-green is to slam the brakes on fossil fuels with no substitute ready, as has happened to Europe due to its imbecilic sanctions on Russian energy. Those sanctions backfired, causing fuel prices to spike. Russia got rich, Europe is going broke and any popular support for ditching oil and gas evaporated. Good work Biden and birdbrain Eurocrats. The west shot itself in the head and set back, possibly a decade, the cause of transitioning off fossil fuels.

But that transition must come; and sooner than a decade. The climate catastrophe is here, already scarifyingly evident in fires, killer heatwaves, massive droughts, floods, storms – and that’s just the beginning. Temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit in British Columbia, as occurred in the summer of 2021, are not normal. Floods in Pakistan that submerge a third of the country are not normal. One hundred degrees in the Russian Arctic town of Verkhoyansk on June 20, 2020, is not normal. Mega-droughts across the western U.S., Europe, Africa and southern China are not normal.

Polar ice melting for good is not normal. And those are only a few of the symptoms that we experience right now, hints of a dark, ferociously difficult human future. Earth has a fever, and the richest countries caused it by burning too much oil, coal and gas. That fever will not die down. It will only go up, unless humanity takes swift, though orderly, thought-out, rational countermeasures.

But you can’t reach zero or even net zero carbon emissions by blowing up gas pipelines. That just makes people frantic, as they face astronomical fuel prices and freezing winters with no heat. Then they do things like reviving the use of coal, chopping down forests to burn another dirty source of energy, wood, and deciding nuclear power might save them (it won’t), as has happened in energy-starved Europe. To make matters worse, the Nordstream explosion caper released 300,000 metric tons of methane into the atmosphere, the equivalent of the annual emissions of one million cars and the largest ever discharge of methane. This is a climate crime, because methane is a greenhouse gas 80 times more potent than carbon.

Imperial gangsters who blow up pipelines won’t bring the green revolution. Wind and solar, many times more than we have already, just might. But that means investment and a legal framework that prohibits idiocies like Biden’s tariffs on Chinese solar tech, now apparently and thankfully waived. In short, the great power rivalry garbage sabotages climate solutions. It makes the climate catastrophe worse, just like everything else, from inflation to shortages of essential commodities to nuclear war.

But that’s what we’re saddled with for now, so the question for climate activists is how to switch to renewables in times of looming nuclear war. That requires recognition that the threat of nuclear extinction is currently the more dire of the two killer crises, because more immediate and more lethal in numbers of corpses. Nuclear winter would starve 5.3 billion people to death. We have no comparable numbers for those killed by the climate catastrophe. In the long run, however, disasters wrought by climate change could be worse, since they would be harder to reverse. A radioactive city can recover over time and can rebuild. A planet overheated by its profligate capitalist denizens does not cool in the frame of a lifetime, or even several. That repair would require millennia. But still attention for the moment is focused on the possible atomic extinction of humanity, as it should be. So far, climate activists have given the very few anti-nuclear war voices the space to make their case. Help advocating for arms control treaties would be a good idea too.

Meanwhile climate activists are tarred as “woke” and blamed for high energy costs by radical right-wingers, as neoliberal imperialists in Washington scramble, not to fund more wind farms, but, predictably, to locate more oil. So no, things do not look good for environmental advocates caught between neoliberal imperial war maniacs on the one hand and far-right, slander-spouting nutcases on the other. All this while pressure mounts on the west to compete with energy-rich Eurasia over fossil fuels. Hopefully it won’t compete. Hopefully it will double down and shift to renewables. But the western gangsters who blew up the Nordstream pipelines only made this more difficult, not less.

A problem on the left is that some climate activists, like everybody else, settled into complacency about nuclear war during the long decades since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Generations passed and with them the dark omens of atomic annihilation, as no more nuclear bombs exploded. Thus the fact that the framework of treaties governing these abominable weapons rotted away did not receive as much political attention as protesting ecocide. It should have. Now, as we teeter on the brink of nuclear Armageddon – if not in Ukraine, then possibly quite soon over Taiwan – it’s obvious that people in the U.S. should have been doing everything possible to get some controls through congress and the white house.

Trump tossed three nuclear arms control deals – the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, the Open Skies treaty and the Iran nuclear pact – into the trash, and Bush threw out the Anti-Ballistic Missile agreement. So those misguided souls who think the Dems are the only ones champing at the bit for World War III should think again. These four abandoned treaties were huge losses for humanity. We need them now more than ever, just like we need politicians with the foresight and backbone to secure them for us. That means talking with Russia and China, not demonizing them. It means deescalating great-power competition, not ramping up the “winnable nuclear war,” fight-it-out nonsense that characterizes Washington’s current political mindset. It means burying the lie that our military can detonate so-called “low-yield” nuclear warheads on the battlefield and the hogwash that their effects will somehow magically remain only on the battlefield.

Planning for a just climate transition is vital, but so is a mass environmental movement to inspire that thoughtful arrangement. The decisive role of a huge, unstoppable movement is what David Camfield argues in his new book, Future on Fire, and he makes the case convincingly. Mass movements are needed, because “governments in capitalist societies are always vulnerable to pressure from corporations.” He observes that “an ‘investment strike’ could cause a societal crisis. States are also subject to pressure from credit rating agencies.”

Excerpted: ‘Climate Activism on the Brink of Nuclear War’.

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